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SUBJECT: Scenesetter for Visit of SPE Andrew Natsios

11. (U) The following is a scene setter for the upcoming visit of Special Presidential Envoy to Sudan Andrew Natsios from October 13 - October 19, 2006.

12. (SBU) General Atmosphere in the Government

-- The NCP has recently backed off on their continuing stream of bellicose rhetoric and actions. Government officials both in the press and privately have indicated they hope this visit will mark a new page in the bilateral relationship based on a true dialogue.

-- While the officials have said they truly want better relations with the U.S., they have also refused to move on 1706 and hope that discussions can focus on other issues, such as alternative plans for Darfur (particularly AU+ with UN support), gaining increased support from non-signatories, and possible easing of sanctions.

-- The government also wants help from the international community finding a way to strengthen the DPA by bringing aboard non-signatories through a combination of pressure and incentives. There have been many countries/organizations proposing non-signatories conferences (Egypt, Libya, Eritrea, Qatar, UN, and a western group led by the US, UK, EU, Netherlands and Norway). The AU has expressed skepticism over all these conferences and believes a meeting in Darfur with the rebel commanders is more appropriate.

-- There are indications that unrealistic expectations about what this visit can accomplish are building, but they will most likely be satisfied if they feel we are really listening to their concerns.

13. (SBU) Situation in Darfur

-- Fighting in Darfur, including government offensives and inter-factional rebel/inter-ethnic conflict, continues. This is largely focused in Northern Darfur, especially along the Chadian border.

-- As the end of the rainy season approaches, rebel groups, Chadians, and the government may launch new, larger offensives. Tensions are already running high, and there was recently some spontaneous gunplay between Minni's forces and another faction in El Fashir.

-- The biggest insecurity issue in Southern Sudan is ethnic conflict centered around the Minawi stronghold of Graida.

-- Minawi continues to ask for some tangible support-- especially food-- to show the advantages of signing the DPA, and claims his troops are starving and his movement may continue to splinter.

-- WFP has recently reported that food access dramatically improved last month, including in areas of North Darfur where they have not had access for months.

14. (SBU) CPA and SPLM/NCP Politics

-- There has been no progress on Abyei, and the SPLM still complains of delays in north/south border demarcation, civil service reform, and transparency in oil revenues. Several SPLM members think the NCP may have implemented as much of the CPA as they ever will.

-- The SPLM's continued support of UN intervention has driven them even further from the NCP, with some NCP leaders threatening to abrogate the CPA.

-- There had been gains in basic freedoms since the signing of the CPA, with journalists becoming emboldened to print what they wanted and people feeling they could assemble and protest on their own. The violent threats against the international community, the crackdown on journalists and the violent break-up of demonstrations have led some Sudanese to feel the regime is now as oppressive as they have ever been in their 18 year reign.

#### 15. (SBU) Other Issues

-- An Eastern Peace Agreement is supposed to be signed on Saturday. The East was given two positions in the Presidency and many posts in state and local government, but no governorships. The question of unifying the region was postponed.

-- President Bashir will most likely ask about Guantanamo detainees. A well thought out response, even if it has no promises of action, would be an easy way to show we are at least thinking about their concerns.

-- The problems with visa issuances continue, and the recent 25 mile limit has affected both Embassy operations and the operations of NGOs with American employees operating throughout the country. While the restriction is supposedly not applicable to American diplomatic staff at the Embassy, it is unclear if this message is

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getting to those responsible for implementing the policy as there have been problems getting on flights (both commercial and UN) and difficulties getting permits to go to Darfur. This also marks the first time since the signing of the CPA that Khartoum has interfered with travel to the South. They had previously been content to allow the South to admit whoever they wanted and travel permits have not been required for travel to the south since December 2005.

HUME